

Intangible Cultural Heritage Update

News and Notes on Newfoundland and Labrador's Intangible Cultural Heritage Program

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Living Heritage Podcast Featured on CBC's Podcast Playlist

In the last edition of the ICH Update, we introduced the Living Heritage Podcast, a special production of CHMR Radio 93.5 FM at Memorial University, produced in collaboration with the Intangible Cultural Heritage Office of the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador which features interviews with people engaged in the heritage sector.

This November, Living Heritage was noticed by CBC Radio's Podcast Playlist — a national radio show that features the best in podcasting. The main goal of Podcast Playlist is to build audiences and engagement for podcasts, providing a weekly curated show that will introduce new listeners through CBC's national radio network, new digital audiences and distribution in the U.S. The ultimate aim is to connect listeners with individual podcasts, drawing content from a range of distributors and independent makers

HFNL was asked by CBC if they could feature an excerpt of Living Heritage on one of our upcoming episodes. We made a few suggestions, and decided together to feature an excerpt from our interview with Dave Paddon.

Dave is originally from Northwest River, Labrador and is descended from two generations of pioneer doctors and nurses who lived and worked in Labrador. He currently lives in St. John's and makes his living as a pilot for Air Canada. In his appearance on the podcast, we discussed Dave's childhood in Northwest River, his family's history in Labrador as doctors and nurses, his parents' involvement in World War II, and his involvement with recitations and the Stage to Stage performances.

Podcast Playlist on CBC reaches over 262,000 new listeners, and offers digital exposure to our podcast through the CBC web site, social media and show podcast. Since the episode featuring Living Heritage was aired, our own podcast episode has been downloaded 750 times! Thanks, CBC, and thanks, Dave! You can find all our podcast episodes on iTunes or online at www.ichblog.ca.

If you have an idea for an organization or topic you think would provide an interesting episode, or if there is an individual working in the heritage sector you would love to hear interviewed, you can contact Dale Jarvis at ich@heritagefoundation.ca or call toll-free 1-888-739-1892 ext 2.

The Power of Safeguarding a Sense of Place: Bridging Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage

By Dale Jarvis, ICH Development Officer

In the early 1900s, a light keeper was attempting some work near the top of the tower at Long Point Light, Twillingate. The cables and weights which turned the light had a habit of tangling as they went up. When the cables knotted, the keeper had to take the weights off the cables wherever they were hung up, free the cable, put the weights back on, and then restart the system.

The keeper was engaged in this at the top of the lighthouse shaft, just below the upper platform where the light is situated. He made a misstep and fell. It was about twelve metres to the brick floor below. Today, there are supports, which were added in the 1980s, but at that time there was nothing for him to slide down or catch hold of.

Just before he hit the brick floor, he was caught, and found himself in the arms of a lady dressed all in white. When he turned back to thank her for saving his life, she disappeared into thin air.

This is one small example of a story about a real place, a designated heritage property, of which can you discover more on the Canadian Register of Historic Places. It is a story about a physical object on the landscape - something that can be quantified and measured and photographed. These are real things that happen to have a layer of legendary meaning ascribed to them, an intangibility that helps those places transcend what some might call their character defining elements. This is part of what intangible cultural heritage is all about.

In the western context, we have thought about heritage as being about things for a long time. Many of our institutions were established to deal with objects or places - museums, archives, heritage preservation societies. In a way, we know how to preserve things, objects, artefacts, documents, buildings. But all of these things have an intangible component that is just as important as the physical.

We have a rich body of cultures and traditions in Newfoundland and Labrador: West Country English, Irish, Inuit, Innu, Mi'kmaq, French, and new Canadians from all over the globe. The overall vision of Newfoundland and Labrador's ICH Strategy is to ensure that Intangible Cultural Heritage is safeguarded as both a living heritage and as a source of contemporary creativity, and to build bridges between diverse cultural groups. NL's ICH strategy has four broad goals: documentation, that work of inventorying ICH; celebration, where we honour our tradition-bearers; transmission, where we ensure that knowledge and skills are passed from person to person and community to community; and cultural industry, where we work to build sustainable communities, using Intangible Cultural Heritage as a development tool.

I have been running Newfoundland and Labrador's ICH program since 2008, but I have been working with the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador (HFNL) since 1995. ICH is a new part of what we do. HFNL was established in 1984 with an original mandate that had nothing to do with intangible cultural heritage, a situation which I am sure will sound familiar to many working in traditional heritage organizations. Our mandate was architectural heritage - the preservation of historic buildings. We know how to preserve things. We've been doing that for decades. In the past, when we designated either an individual building or a provincial heritage district, we put up a plaque noting the architectural and historical importance of the site. And then we walked away, and had little involvement with the community.

With the establishment of our ICH program, that has changed. Buildings and neighbourhoods have an intangible component that is just as important as the physical. Our work with our Registered Heritage Districts Program, is, for us, a new approach in how our agency deals with the designation and conservation of heritage areas and neighbourhoods. We are re-thinking our relationship with townscapes and the people who live in them. Our strategy for heritage districts has transformed into



something much more fluid, more organic, and more responsive to the needs and desires of the people who live in and administrate the district.

In a sense, our approach with districts is similar to our work on other ICH projects - we conduct field research, assess local needs, and develop public programs around those needs. In one district, Heart's Content, our then districts officer Lisa Wilson conducted hours of oral history research, photography, and geospatial memory mapping with residents. The end product was a booklet of local stories, launched as part of our district plaque unveiling, an online story map, as well as a set of grassroots recommendations and observations on its living and built heritage, which was presented back to the town council and the local historical society.

Where possible, we take on research projects on expressions of culture under threat, or which are underrepresented in academic research, and often, those involve the kinds of built heritage we might not see designated or placed on a register of historic places. We've done research on root cellars and traditional knowledge around food storage, then mapping and sharing that information, partnering with groups like the Food Security network. As another example, HFNL worked on a project in partnership with Memorial's Department of Folklore on traditional wells and springs, documenting the built heritage of wells. Wells are sometimes the oldest surviving built heritage in settler communities. Wells also encode a tremendous amount of traditional knowledge around the use, meaning, construction, and maintenance of rural water resources. Researching and documenting wells allows us to use built heritage to talk about intangibles like conservation, ecology, and community.

We undertake projects like one we started in Champney's West in the summer of 2015, where we help communities map out their heritage assets, tangible and intangible, so they can develop strategies to safeguard both.

Earlier this year we completed an oral history of the Jenkins House in Durrell, Twillingate, which was owned for a portion of its history by Adolphus and Lucretia Jenkins. According to oral history, Lucretia contracted tuberculosis and suffered in the home for many years with the disease. She was confined to her bedroom, and during her illness, her husband Adolphus passed away. Adolphus was waked in the home, which was tradition at the time. Bedridden and unable to leave the upstairs of the house, Lucretia still wanted to see her husband one last time. The family decided, instead of trying to bring her downstairs they would saw a hole in the floor by the side of her bed so she could rest and still be able to see her husband, so that is what they did. Today, the cut in the floor is still recognizable by the newer boards that fill where the hole once was. Building change over time, they evolve for human reasons. Documenting the oral histories of our designated properties helps us better understand the meanings, uses, and changes to the physical structures of those buildings.

The late Historic Places Initiative (HPI) defined heritage value as: "the aesthetic, historic, scientific, cultural, social or spiritual importance or significance for past, present or future generations." All of these are related to our intangible cultural heritage. You can't save historic places without collecting the stories associated with them. Without the stories, community values, and associated social experiences, these places are meaningless.

We all move through cultural landscapes, we all create tangible things based on our beliefs and knowledge. We need to think holistically about conservation strategies that move beyond the preservation of built fabric. We need to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage that is tied inextricably to our historic places.

ICH is based in communities. It happens at the community level. It grows out of places. Linking built heritage and intangible cultural heritage isn't difficult, or new, or daunting. This division we have in our heads about different types of heritage isn't real. Everyday living communities do not differentiate between built heritage and intangible cultural heritage. They just have heritage. We need to start thinking about the strategies and techniques in use to safeguard intangible cultural heritage, and recognize that they present incredible opportunities to safeguard built heritage as part of an ongoing, constantly evolving process of community meaning and use.

A version of this article was presented at the National Trust for Canada conference in Calgary, Alberta, Oct 20-24, 2016. Photo of Long Point Lighthouse HFNL/Andrea O'Brien 2006.

Christmas Fools in Newfoundland

By Sharna Brzycki, Mummers Festival

From lace veils and pillow stuffed pants to proudly flaunted brassieres, if you've spent the holiday season in Newfoundland you know all about the wildly fun practice of mummering. What you may not have heard about before are peculiar characters known as "fools".

Mummering is often thought of as a house-to-house visiting tradition, but in the 1800s mummers, often referred to as fools, had a large public presence. In this time of folly people got away with behaviour that would otherwise be considered unacceptable. During the twelve days of Christmas the fools meandered through the streets causing mayhem wherever they went. They often carried inflated bladders filled with pebbles that they would use to hit people with!

Men often made models of ships small enough to secure on the top of their hat. Multiple accounts describe their outfits consisting of white shirts and pants covered in assorted ribbons and tinsel.

Right: "Christmas in the Olden Days" (1913), by J.W. Hayward (Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador, MG 334-37, Box 2, File 5). A nostalgic depiction of 'fool' traditions in St. John's, including a ship hat and inflated bladder!



The only descriptions of fools in living memory come from the early- to mid -1900s in the towns of Pouch Cove and Flatrock. During this time a distinction was made between mummers and fools. Mummers were those who went door to door whereas the mischievous fools were a public holiday spectacle. If you happened to be caught by one, you'd likely get roughed up a bit--a light whip of a rope or a rub in the snow was common practice.

Like their predecessors, Pouch Cove and Flatrock outfits consisted of a white shirt and pants covered in multicolored crêpe paper ribbons and holiday tinsel. The ship hat seemed to disappear altogether and was replaced by what was known in Pouch Cove as the 'fool's face'. This ribbon-adorned hat and mask was characterized by dramatic facial features, often made from wood stove ash and scraps of animal fur.



Harry Langmead of Pouch Cove (left) and other fools displaying their costumes in the backyard of Pouch Cove resident Elke Dettmer. (Photo courtesy of Elke Dettmer)

It was of the utmost importance that costumes were kept a secret until they could be worn into town for the festivities. When the time came, friends gathered together and ventured to a hidden location to prepare. Russell Langmead of Pouch Cove, who dressed as a fool with his brother Harry over fifty years ago, recalls:

We'd have a car to pick us up... put the rigs in the car and we'd go on into Shoe Cove. Go on into the woods and hide away and put it on... You couldn't put it on down at the house because they'd know exactly who you are! So then you had a rope about the size of a three quarter rope and splice an eye into it, put it over your hand on your wrist, and you'd be twirling it around

like that and then get going.

With their ribbons dancing in the wind and ropes swinging they would set out to town where the foolery would begin. Families gathered to watch in delight as the fools chased passersby, giving them a crack of their rope. Sometimes young boys hid underneath the fish flakes as the fools' masks were too tall to fit underneath.

Life long resident Chris Kavanagh has vivid memories of the ribbon fools in Flatrock. He told us a story about a friend who was momentarily trapped by a gang of ribbon fools one evening many years ago:

...We had a friend that used to visit us regular, Charlie Martin. And this particular night in Christmas [Charlie] came down...but he came a bit late. He said what a job he had to get out of the yard. He said just as he got in his pickup to come down here [and] the ribbon fools, four or five of 'em I think he said, came in the yard. And he said they were waiting and going around and trying, trying to see if he would get out of the truck. And this is what they were gonna do, give him a rubbin' in the snow, cause they knew he was scared to death right?"

The fools of Pouch Cove and ribbon fools of Flatrock were born out of the founding traditions of the 19th century and adapted in distinct ways to fit the spirit of the communities they served. While the tradition is no longer practiced in Newfoundland, it is our hope that these cherished memories of the Christmas fools will carry on and last for years to come.

Step Dance Project records step moves and stories

Who in your family or community pulls out "old time" dance moves at kitchen parties, weddings, or community concerts? When the NL toe tapping music starts up, who's light on their feet with moves that stay close to the floor? Maybe it's Mom or dad, an auntie or uncle, or your nan or poppy? If this describes you or someone you know, we'd love to hear from you!

NL Step Dance Project is looking for "old style" NL step dancers willing to share their step moves and stories.

Traditional NL step is the freeform solo style of stepping you would have found in the home, at a kitchen party, at a wedding or at a community concert: step dancing that would be close to the floor, with dancers who are light on their feet. Dancers wouldn't have been trained but would have been able to feel the music and express themselves through their feet.

We are looking for dancers who know this step style or anyone who has memories or stories to share about the tradition. We are interested in how this stepping style is picked up, passed on, and performed.

Sessions are being organized in the New Year for interested step dancers and tradition bearers. A stipend and travel reimbursements will be provided for participants.

For more information email:

nlstepdanceproject@gmail.com or visit
www.facebook.com/NLstepdanceproject.

The NL Step Dance Project is lead by Kristin Harris Walsh (step dancer/researcher) in partnership with Dale Jarvis at the Intangible Cultural Heritage office. It is part of a larger project documenting and comparing the dance histories of three step dance forms from Ontario, Cape Breton, and Newfoundland. This project is funded by the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Photo credit: Meghan Forsyth.



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